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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 002315

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER
LONDON FOR CGURNEY
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER
PARIS FOR NEARY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2012

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE TEACHERS' STRIKE: GOZ RIDING ROUGHSHOD
OVER WORKER DISCONTENT

REF: HARARE 2308

Classified By: Laboff Karen Bel for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (U) Summary: In events which have been monitored world-wide, the GOZ has cracked down on striking members of the Progressive Teachers, Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) with characteristic harshness. After GOZ responses which included PTUZ office raids, dubious arrests of PTUZ members, assault, threats and harassment of the PTUZ leader Raymond Majongwe, his family, and detention of Majongwe with subsequent allegations of torture while in police custody, the GOZ announced that all striking teachers were summarily fired. In a new development, Majongwe was re-arrested on October 16, possibly tortured, and "lost" in the system for several days before his scheduled October 21 bail hearing. End summary.

Teachers' Strike

2. (U) The teachers' strike -- which began as a "go-slow" action on September 6 -- developed into a full-fledged strike on October 8. The strike was called by PTUZ, which has a constituency of approximately 15,000 members, rather than the ZANU-PF-allied Zimbabwe Teachers, Association (ZIMTA), which claims 55,000 members. PTUZ has been much more confrontational than ZIMTA in addressing teachers' grievances over the past year. The Secretary General of ZIMTA has stated that his organization is involved in "dialogue" with the GOZ regarding pay raises, and has formally distanced his organization from the strike. However, according to the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, the PTUZ hopes for widespread support for the strike by the rank and file membership of ZIMTA beginning this week. Chief among the teachers' complaints are low salary and poor working conditions. Although teachers are considered to be civil servants providing "essential services" (and thus precluded from engaging in a strike) along with police, medical personnel, and armed forces, their remuneration lags far behind that of their supposed peers. Additionally, teachers have been subjected to relentless assault and harassment from both war vets and youth militia groups, in some cases fleeing their rural schools in terror, whenever they are suspected of sympathizing with the opposition MDC party.

3. (U) The strike has been described by labor groups as a "matter of survival." Newly-qualified teachers earn Zim \$25,000 per month after a three-year training course (approximately US \$26.31 at current parallel exchange rates), while newly-qualified nurses earn Zim \$60,000 per month (approximately US \$63.15). New police constables earn approximately Zim \$30,000 per month (US \$31.57) after a one-year training course, and new army privates earn slightly more just by virtue of passing the physical. Members of the uniformed forces were awarded a 165% increase in salary during the last year, and doctors and nurses have been awarded "significant" increases in their pay packages after a strike in July/August, while teachers were granted a mere 55% increase in salary last January (with an official inflation rate of 139%).

4. (U) Despite assurances by the GOZ that teachers would be awarded "massive" salary increases in January 2003, the PTUZ urged all teachers -- whether PTUZ members or not -- to participate in the strike by reporting to work and then refusing to teach. The PTUZ estimates that approximately 85% of their members have engaged in the work stoppage, along with approximately 15% of ZIMTA members, in the face of GOZ proclamations that the work action was a failure. However, after several days of striking, the Public Service Commission announced on October 15 that 627 teachers had been fired for engaging in the strike. The PTUZ has challenged the dismissals, claiming that the labor action is legal and that the dismissals did not follow procedural steps. The dismissals have earned world-wide condemnation by labor and civil society groups, including the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and AFL-CIO.

15. (U) According to published reports, police arrested the PTUZ president and secretary on October 8 and confiscated some files and the office keys. The president and secretary were released on the same day, but the secretary was ordered to close down the PTUZ office. Early on the morning of October 9, riot police surrounded the home of Raymond Majongwe, secretary-general of the PTUZ, who was not present, and allegedly beat up Majongwe's wife and housemaid and harassed his 3-year-old and 5-year-old child in an attempt to determine Majongwe's whereabouts. Majongwe subsequently turned himself in to the police later the same morning, and was eventually charged under a subsection of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) for "interfering with the rights of others" by allegedly threatening teachers and headmasters who refused to engage in the strike.

16. (C) Majongwe detailed a chilling picture to colleagues at the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) (strictly protect). Due to the increased scrutiny of labor groups by the GOZ and a resulting distance between the Mission and labor groups, this communication was received via the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center (strictly protect). According to Majongwe's account, after he was formally processed by the police, he was questioned by several officers for approximately two hours, and was eventually told that he could leave without being charged. He stated that as he was heading toward the police station exit, he was intercepted and "detained" by several men in plain clothes, whom he assumed to be Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) operatives, who attempted to divert him to another location. Majongwe claimed that he had been warned by a police officer that he would be killed if he left the police station, and he interpreted the attempted diversion as a hostile move. According to Majongwe, his understanding was that the police would be able to say that he had been released and they had no knowledge of his whereabouts, when in fact he had been kidnapped and killed by the CIO. Majongwe -- who is a very large man -- then began to struggle with the plain-clothed men and tried to force his way to the exit, dragging his assailants with him. While he did not have much hope of escape, he did hope to draw attention to his presence and the fact that he was being forcibly detained. Fortunately for Majongwe, a commuter bus was unloading passengers at the entrance, and members of the public became witnesses to his unequal struggle with his captors. He stated that several people recognized him and began to chant his name, which ensured that the public knew that he remained in police custody. He was finally overpowered and moved to another section of the police station, where he alleged that he was beaten and tortured by the police and CIO for a period of over four hours. On October 10, Majongwe's attorney reported that his client was incoherent, could hardly speak or stand, and was suffering from suspected internal injuries including broken ribs. Majongwe was released on bail (remand) on October 11.

17. (C) Majongwe also told the ZCTU that the police had confiscated from the PTUZ office a document which purportedly connected the PTUZ with the USG. Although there has been no direct written contact between the Embassy and the PTUZ, there have been communications (possibly including documents) between USAID and the PTUZ in relation to allegations of assault and abuse of teachers around the March presidential elections by war vets, youth militias, and ZANU-PF supporters. Majongwe was certain that such a document would be used as an excuse to paint the PTUZ as a group "collaborating with the USG for the overthrow of the Mugabe regime." Given the GOZ's increased scrutiny of NGOs perceived to be working with opposition elements, this document -- if it exists -- could prove problematic.

18. (U) In a separate development, Majongwe was subsequently re-arrested on Wednesday, October 16, after addressing a group of teachers at a Harare high school. Arrested at the same time were the PTUZ national coordinator and the PTUZ treasurer, who were later released. Although Majongwe was originally detained at Marlborough Police Station, officers at that station stated that he had been transferred to Harare Central Police Station on Thursday, October 17. However, the Harare Central Police Station would not confirm that Majongwe was being held, and authorities clearly stalled in order to hold Majongwe over the weekend. The independent press reports that Majongwe was tortured with electric shocks applied to his mouth and genitals. The press also reports that the Attorney General declined to press new charges and that Majongwe should finally get his bail hearing on October 21. Majongwe's medical condition remains compromised due to his mistreatment during his previous incarceration, and PTUZ treasurer MacDonald Mangauzani is quoted as saying that they "fear for his life."

19. (U) Due to widespread economic and industrial problems, labor unrest is predicted to increase during the remainder of this year. Lecturers at the University of Zimbabwe are similarly engaged in a work stoppage (to be reported septel), although the official response has been much lower profile. The GOZ remains under constant scrutiny by various international labor groups for the deteriorating situation of labor unions as well as its response to the teachers' strike. The AFL-CIO reports that a labor delegation -- including representatives from SATTUC, COSATU, and OATU -- is scheduled to visit Zimbabwe during the next week. The AFL-CIO is disappointed that the delegation is scheduled to meet with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and President Mugabe, in addition to the Minister of Labor, as they feel that this gives the Mugabe government another opportunity to co-opt the dialogue and dilutes the value of the labor-to-labor statement of solidarity.

110. (U) Comment. One of the more sinister implications of the GOZ's handling of the teachers' strike is the coincidence of the mandate that all students at teachers' colleges now be graduates of the "national service" training such as that provided to the youth militias. Teachers have been a prime target for retaliation and harassment by war vets and youth militias -- including humiliation, summary dismissal, assault, injury, rape, and even murder -- on even the faintest suspicion that they might harbor MDC sympathies. At least one commentator has openly speculated that firing the striking teachers is paving the way for a new "chimurenga" (revolution) in the educational system, whose resolution lies in "fast-track" appointment of properly indoctrinated youth militia members as full-scale teachers.

111. (U) Comment continued. Regardless of the ultimate outcome of this particular strike, the labor unrest in the teachers' ranks is symptomatic of the deterioration of the situation of the average Zimbabwean worker. Inflation has risen to at least 139% (reftel), and the current parallel exchange rate stands at 950:1, in stark contrast to the official rate of 55:1. The ZCTU has publicly warned of "spontaneous reaction" by workers to the "harsh economic climate." Although this particular strike might not be the spark that sets society alight, many observers are watching the GOZ to see how it manages to contain a potentially explosive situation. End comment.
SULLIVAN